



poems

Tom Corrado



## Day by Day

Your flights of fantasy nosedive into three squares which you concede is an odd number for the health-conscious. Gym rats continue to derail your train-of-thought with suggestions of sidebars and makeovers for snowbirds. You have been carved out and readied for the last coat. There's nothing to do but wait tables. Your failure to make eye contact with the old neighborhood has raised concerns about your suitability as a soulmate. Meanwhile, the conductor raises his baton and a barn in one fell swoop. The ball is at the top of the pole. The track is clear. You are on your way.

## Duplicity

Again, you've misplaced your words, dialed 911, and were added to the queue. Irregularities gather beneath your window, bearing moments, however improbable. The game of chance calls. You try to figure the odds this time before jumping in but hubris keeps knocking down the house of cards. Your request to be among the favored few will be submitted and ignored. Due to a lack of interest, stanzas have been deleted. There is no future tense. Can there be loss without gain?

## More than the Tree-Lined Streets

The days, busy with their tree-lined streets, are sadly more than enough for many despite their claustrophobic underpinnings and the worried look on the faces of billboards: the retired academic with his early bird specialty; the Wittgenstein scholar and his prim partner clutching her handbag and Old World dictionary, yellowed and dog-eared, huddled with their hound on a flowered windowseat overlooking the local aquifer overgrown and struggling for recognition. Woe to those befuddled crossword puzzlers or those courting constellations on rooftops with the satisfaction of a meandering brook. Switch-hitting is long dead. The words not spoken continue to say it all: the unsolved math problems, the crumbling fruit stands, the forgotten air pumps hissing at the encroaching rust.

## Sidebar

I can't bite into an ear of corn without picturing Johnny Depp in that 2004 desert island favorite *Secret Window* based on Stephen King's novella *Secret Window, Secret Garden* though, Scout's Honor, the rotting remains of my ex-wife and my

understudy are not pushing up corn stalks in my garden which, incidentally, is being slowly decimated by deer whose nightly takeaways are notated in the soil by their bifurcated hoof prints which has led me to google ultrasonic pest repeller as touted by my 90-year-old neighbor who, embracing technology, closeted his muzzle loader and bought one of those sonic gizmos at Brookstone in the mall. Deer aside, my immediate concern is preventing the appearance in late fall and early spring of a mud pool in the middle of my path to the woodshed by diverting runoff into a four-inch slotted drain pipe which I have ceremoniously buried in a 40-foot long three-foot deep trench which I carved out manually with a composite-handled pick ax from the local Agway while imagining Steve Jobs on tractor happily mowing my fields of dreams.

#### From Somewhere Else

You're pulled over for texting, and launch into a diatribe on the correct use of sans-serif fonts, trying to explain that you're not from here, the land of barleycorned, quick-fix heretics, hog-wild trampers of community gardens, flippant proselytizers of otherworldly elixirs

as well as down-to-earth pharmaceuticals; that you are in fact from somewhere else, from somewhere along the macadam to enlightenment, the way littered with impediments and withering voicemails itching to be free. You try to explain that the overnight at Lord Weary's Castle was a mistake, a misstep, a singular disappointment, and that there's nothing wrong with buying into the psychodrama of the Method, that it is in fact the only proven, money-back-guaranteed way the pieces will fit, tattered but neat but so what, highlighting the proposition that cataloging the colors of Why is busy work for newhires naive enough to try to impress top brass with double-blinds. Sustain the effort? Pshaw! How-tos from a nobody in some backwater.

### Off-the-Shelf

Off-the-shelf placeholders know the Secret of the Dance and at least three or four Romance languages which they like to use off-season with aimless wanderers behind closed doors. They also like to play gin rummy on overcast days when most of us hide beneath piles of blankets counting the hours between bouts of blue. They

dislike the sweltering heat that cuts through the calm like the hedge clippers of those marshaling efforts to test the waters of love. Insistence is key. In an eye-blink the tide can turn and wash the careless out to sea where, if lucky, they will be able to re-connect with long-lost ilk-mates and begin again. Making the most of tragedy is what it's all about n'est-il pas? Like Rothko with his unframed color fields of dreams, or 20/20-ers with their panoramic views, unfettered by wire rim or tortoise shell, embracing the natural confluence of primaries and secondaries, giving them a foot in the door and a leg to stand on.

#### An Adult's Christmas in Nantucket

We paid the price and boarded for the rough crossing catching whiffs of a paperback rider as we took our faded vinyl seats amid designer bags and backpacks with stretch marks. Once off, I escaped to the afterdeck under the glare of Ahab's understudy, preferring the romance of the sea to the chattiness of the Times until the waving of hands by the long-time-no-sees guided us to the island. Then on to the cobblestone slog from the wharf to white-haired Barbara's B&B,

exacting its toll on the plastic wheels of space age luggage. Later, the shrill of smoke detectors, unaccustomed to the seriousness of eighteenth century hearths, would punctuate the much-touted Christmas walk, where a no-nonsense spaniel of some unknown vintage sat primly on a sofa in front of a fire, eyeing the intruding landlubbers traipsing through his home at this most ungodly of hours, decked out in - get this - blue-tinged booties as if we were all to be herded posthaste into a delivery room for the birth of yet another ne'er-do-well in swaddling; while outside one of the larger evergreens, bedecked with strands of multicolored blinking lights emitting the scent of whale oil, was soon set upon by hordes of down-filled stamping feet for canned poses to be Facebooked in nanoseconds. The evening capped by a graybeard, whose highbrowed delivery of *A Child's Christmas in Wales*, with two thespianettes acting out various images, would have been enough for Thomas himself to fall yet again off the wagon and tip a few with the furrowed seamen whose varnished visages bore down on us from their perches on the library's hallowed walls with eyes privy to sights to which even Thomas's words would have failed to do justice.

## Tenement

A knee floats high above a kiosk-splattered byway, a knee untethered from the brittleness of the brilliant end run, a knee familiar with the barleycorned lights of the harbor, a knee soon-to-be-the-subject of a full-length feature film directed by a cohort, presently in disarray, talking up a titanium replacement with a pair of bosomy twins who are here to audition for the choir of an intricate chapel at the behest of a man of the cloth who just now ducked out to get nipped and tucked. Why risk chronic stiffness? colors the quartet's first jabs as a bird of a different feather nests on the roof of a tenement pockmarked with air conditioners trucked in by mobs of Teamsters in the high heat of summer stock's seasonal playoffs. There's an Old World charm to this, and to the alopecia-plagued hound chasing a Brussels sprout across the linoleum floor laid down several scores of years ago by unemployed steeplejacks contemplating midlife career changes when all else failed. The commonplace has arrived on the scene as well, replete with contortionists hawking cut rates along the bus line, their timeworn notions inhabiting sultry nights when little else of interest is scheduled to air on

the local cable. Desire overwhelms several emergency shelters. The lights throb and pulse with metaphorical otherworldliness. At times like these, it's best to overlook the cereal stains in the breakfast nook left by the stranger who at first appeared whimsical almost desultory in his buttoned-down oxford but later metamorphosed into a high-pressure hair-replacement strategist taking us aback when without asking he flashed his credentials, drank too much, and wouldn't stop talking. He'd wanted to get to know us better but we were onto him this time and late for work besides.

## Second Position

Yesterday's walkabout went quite well, the three chairs in the olive grove welcoming the visitors who had boarded the bus as a last resort with open arms which turned out to be stuffed with aspiring actors and cotton batting. The ballet dancers in the second position were the first to point(e) this out, while the rest of the company caught unaware at the barre noted that the invitations had been printed with an error which spelled disaster as far as they were concerned but once the stage hands

were idle and the curtain was raised, all fell into place as if nothing had happened which in fact was true. It was a bit of a stretch, even for ballet dancers, to assume the worst case scenario, and later someone was seen jotting down a reminder to have security look into the ingredients of the house specials for the night of October 10, 1996, a night of incidental amusements and wilted lettuce. With all this finally behind us we sat back eager to dive into our popcorn awaiting the performance which to our wrinkled disappointment was cancelled because a leek of all things was found in the soup.

#### A Good Time for a Blueberry Muffin

Or so I thought, but then a baglady stalled the checkout line insisting she had the answer to this morning's Minute Mystery. The manager appeared with bowtie and dog-eared copy of Crisis Management and promptly swept her through the automatic doors and into the parking lot where she now stands, spouting, in the falsetto of a soccer mom, that she's married to the local storm window king, a mail-order-minister-cum-entrepreneur whose ads, identified by the outline of a fish, clutter the local cable. He will

not be happy when he hears about her mistreatment. Meanwhile, the manager has leaned in for a word with the Sheriff of Nottingham, who seems to have eaten himself out of his tights which reminds me, I'd better pick up a bag or two of fish and chips. The bagboy at the end of the checkout line has the knowing smile of a Zen master. He has seen this all before two or three times.

#### And Then What Happened?

I made my way along a narrow passage lined with faded photographs of strangers who had won Golden Book Awards. I found a scrapbook among the matchbooks on the back porch. It had been placed there under lock and key. I opened it and read the directions which were printed in Japanese with a fuzzy font. Nip it in the bud was the only thing I could make out. I rechecked the parts order just to be sure. The twins burst through the door of the trailer and began scrambling eggs with a marionette, mumbling tales about their grandfather, a WWII vet. It was obvious they were being stoic about something enormous left on the stoop with a note pinned to its trousers. A bright yellow Tonka dump truck took a dive. The twins panicked.

A chef's torso stared out of the sleeper no doubt awaiting a curtain call. Bodies in motion in the weather-beaten clapboards slipping past glued themselves to screens with Elmer's for the latest culinary treat. The lights dimmed. A disembodied voice informed us of the location of the emergency exits.

### A Cup of Joe

Before moving to this city I'd never heard it put that way. So, for a while, I had this vision of chowing down on chunks of the poor sap who drew the shortest straw and was bopped on the head, put out of his misery, sliced, diced, cupped, and shared among the rest of us in the lifeboat. Y'know what I mean, like we were in that film directed by that British chap - the profile poser - the guy whose mugshot floated by in a newspaper; picked up by the Rachel, the devious-cruising Rachel, that in her retracing search after her missing children - at least that's what it says on page 536 of my copy of that lit hit subtitled *The Whale* - found this dude clinging to some savage's coffin, and a couple hundred knots beyond, found us, and impressed us into service - wouldn't y'know - on that creaky, water-logged,

whaler-wannabe, that skimmed the Horn, and eventually dropped anchor off the coast of Tahiti, where the not-so-friendly natives wined and dined on us, after introducing us to this banker-turned-painter, who brewed a titillating pot of coffee and proceeded to drone on about various exploits he'd shared with some red-haired-maniac-artist-Kirk-Douglas-look-alike, whose spectacles kept sliding over the hole where his ear shoulda been, shortly before we were cauldroned while enjoying this incredible extemporaneous exhibition of drumming and chanting.

#### And When on Muggy Days

And when on muggy days, hybridizers bask in their fifteen minutes, signing CDs, utterly disbelieving the inked-in portions, it's time to pull out the stops from five-star organs and return to that scene from Chinatown where acronyms failed and PIs welcomed small change from strangers in sinister overcoats. Plagues continue to sprint across the screen, unflappable in their synchronicity, tallying the victims on their off days, normal folk rising to the aroma of coffee beans, schoolbuses depositing their packets under the tattered cloth. Winsome, though we are,

it is difficult to imagine a happy ending stocked with finger foods from the four corners, spotlighting white sand and shortbread featured on late night infomercials between station-breaks that leave viewers with a strange taste in their mouth. And when we try to sort it out, to file it under Nice Try, to back-burner it, it nonetheless returns, unopened with insufficient postage, as if it knew all along that it would never leave, that it had in fact become indispensable to the awkward construction of our beautiful life.

#### Mayonnaise Sandwiches

Patti ate tape. She carried around one of those red-and-green Scotch tape dispensers - the metal kind with the serrated edge - and every now and then would pop a piece into her mouth. I attributed her pale skin to that delicacy, and wondered how the tape was able to traverse the miles of intestine we had read about in Scholastic Science, the weekly newsheet Sister Edward made us subscribe to and read from every Thursday afternoon to break up the archaic lab experiments we, or rather she, demonstrated, flanked by Bunsen burners, pipettes, and crotchety nine-

volt batteries, in a vain, nationwide knee-jerk to supplant Sputnik; the same Sister Edward, or Stir Edward, the truncation used when, leaning forward in the wood-and-wrought-iron desks bolted in tandem to the floor, we vied for our fifteen minutes of fame as we arced our propped-up hands 130 degrees in front of her great stone face to signify our readiness to regurgitate some trivium if called upon; the same Sister Edward, ornamented with half a dozen rubber bands on each wrist, who held a marksmanship medal for knuckle accuracy at three yards with a twelve-inch ruler, and who, like Merlin, kept, among other trinkets, a handkerchief up her sleeve. Patty may have been partial to tape, but my pièce de résistance was mayonnaise sandwiches, ideally accompanied on their journey to the center of the torso by a slug of Ovaltine, which, decades before the cyanide-laced Tylenol scare sent American companies scrambling for ingenious devices to outwit disgruntled, axe-grinding, former employees as well as garden-variety sick tickets, used a waxed paper seal that had to be broken to get to the brown crystals, and which, if sent with a fifty-cent piece taped to a square of cardboard to some storefront address in Battlecreek, Michigan, displayed at

the end of Captain Midnight's Sunday morning black-and-white half hour, entitled the sender to one plastic decoder ring.

### The Final Matinee

He reminds me of that choreographer - the one with the name like an artichoke. Years later a bushel of Post-its was found floating in the runoff. He had supposedly written them to a well-known patron of the arts. Someone even hired a college dropout to enter his jottings into a database hoping to discover a thread. Those things never seem to pan out. Like that fledgling paperworker with the color-coordinated gray matter. When the doorbell rang, he conjured a discounted scheme catching the solicitor off-guard. It was as hilarious as soap. They had to squeegee the pavilion for most of the month after a few of them visited the historic site on their lunch hour scattering crumpled-up brown paper bags. Fortunately the ground crew had been trained in skewering. The Instant Doppler technology incidentally didn't help one iota, but the ponchos, as colorful as cartoon characters, took up the slack. With so much going for them, it was a

shock to hear that they walked off leaving onlookers aghast. Matinees I suppose are as good a getaway as it gets. Next time I'll try to plan ahead a little better. If I had my druthers, I'd move the berm. Then we'd have an unobstructed view of the fisheries which only last year were saved from encroachment. Something to be said for those tele-marketers who insist on calling around dinnertime disrupting the passing of mustard and all that.

#### Random Inattentiveness

Your pic morphs into Byzantium, sails clogging the harbor, wide-eyed travelers milling about, awaiting the clarity of William Butler, the clock etching the hours onto your foundationed face. Penmanship is a deal-breaker. It has always mattered as a barometer of integrity, one's cursive gymnastics, like the handshake, an index of the soul's weight unencumbered by the seconds shaved off by nothing less than a balletic leap out of the starting blocks and into the post position. If push comes to shove, deploy the gawker blog, risk a double-parking ticket, as if scribbling some message beneath a wall hanging targets you as the one that didn't get away. I don't mind. I have errands to

run, aisles to traverse before payday  
which always seems to interrupt closed  
captioning with the caveat: We'll have  
to get back to you on that.

### Another Ordinary Morning

*Tonight as it gets cold tell yourself  
what you know which is nothing. . . .*

- Mark Strand

The leaves coax the light into a snow  
sky. . . . The cat remains noncommittal.  
. . . A simplicity of one, costumed,  
belabored, fraught with delusion  
lingers in a dream of the shore. . . .  
The voice at the door continues the  
story. . . . The organs of day engage a  
Netflix world, spiriting you away. . . .  
Late at night when you toss, tell  
yourself that you love who you are,  
that your half-concealed life is not  
without promise. . . .

### You Are Reassigned . . . Elsewhere

Your Likert-type scale with its even  
number of anchors renders fence-  
sitting impossible . . . Not that anyone  
cares . . . Auditions for Player-of-  
the-Month continue . . . The constant  
gardener . . . The reassignment of  
persons places things . . . You are

reassigned . . . elsewhere . . . You  
apply for a sabbatical . . . to study  
ins-and-outs . . . redactions . . .  
Expungements like a good neighbor . . .  
The bus stations of your odyssey morph  
into empty rooms . . . Mannequins  
appear . . . and color-code themselves .  
. . . to fit in . . . Implied otherness . . .  
is not an oft-used phrase . . . Quickly,  
the storm of texts arrives . . .  
uninvited . . . Reading the odd  
numbered chapters . . . evenly spaced .  
. . . is one way to go . . . Questions from  
past players . . . hoping to score . . .  
choke your answering machine . . .  
Your mother appears and orders a  
chunk of suet for gołąbki . . .  
Porcelain-skinned Angela, the store  
owner's wife, reaches across the  
counter . . . with a piece of fruit . . .  
The window showcases bound, hanging  
cheeses . . . their sharpness . . . the  
entrapment of memory . . . squeezing  
through the fence . . . dealing . . . or  
not . . . A Proustian moment as joie de  
vivre . . .

### The High Romance of Pursuit

The thought of Klein's patented riff  
on ultramarine and the high romance  
of pursuit saturate your jealousy of  
time despite a high wind advisory. Gym  
rats crowd onto a blue continuum with

feigned defeat pained by the thought of your strange repetitions, their ineptitude straining the windows with halftime images. You were climactically rebuffed, yes? But who's to say why? Certainly not page-turners who know the morbidity of sand slipping in and out of costume and into the role of street only to be shunted off into a siding. You, not unlike many, are mired in the phrase *bald-face lies*, its etymology as elusive as imaginary numbers skipping beats to the turntable's scratching. An obsession with interludes will soon spell relief.

#### A Piece of Nothing

*That's all there was to it. No more than a solemn waking to brevity.*

- Mark Strand

And then, again, you decide to look at the sketches of domes in cities you've never visited, and probably never will, the domes having insinuated themselves into your reading and into your life. You don't even know the names of the cities and towns but they're pleasant to look at, and spark images of travel. There are moments when the armchair you're sitting in by the window overlooking the park seems

to lift off and float above the canals  
in the cities. You strike up  
conversations with strangers in  
languages you don't even know. This  
could be a wish, or a piece of nothing,  
connecting you to the world.

### Sometimes the Wrong Words

Caedmon, the illiterate cowherd,  
learned to sing in a dream . . . The  
seductiveness of the transcendent  
impulse, yes? . . . The words sometimes  
coming . . . sometimes not . . .  
sometimes the wrong words . . . No  
watcher at the gate, they enter the  
arena and the ears of others . . .  
their attempt to hurdle the ho-hum  
foredoomed to failure . . . You steel  
yourself . . . against what? . . .  
conformity? . . . obsolescence? . . .  
Free-wheeling afterthoughts stampede  
pageviews . . . provide just enough  
fluidity to prime a cold winter's night  
. . . the moon taking on all comers . . .  
in all weight classes . . . The concept  
of an afterlife . . . so day-before-  
yesterday . . . Are you still there? . . .  
. or have you retreated into the deep  
woods of derivation? . . . Day-trippers  
choke supermarkets' aisles . . . fall  
victim to the trumpet's dissonance . . .  
without the bells and whistles . . .  
without the enthusiasm . . . of post-

coital anaerobics . . . All for naught?  
. . . If push comes to shove, applicants  
will be required to submit their  
soliloquies in triplicate with a  
Sharpie . . .

### Schiele

After he died from the Spanish flu in 1918 at age 28, the artist Egon Schiele, whose painting *Houses With Colorful Laundry (Suburb II)* sold at Sotheby's London in 2011 for \$40 million, moved into my neighbor's pigeon coop. The pigeons were racing homers. My neighbor would let them out every day to exercise. They would fly in circles above the neighborhood. Schiele would sometimes help. On race days my neighbor and Schiele would transport the pigeons to the starting location, release them, drive back home, and wait for them to return. When a pigeon returned, my neighbor would remove a band from its leg and insert it into a time clock. Finishing times would be recorded and compared to determine the winner. The pigeon coop had a coal stove. Schiele would warm his hands over it. I would dribble spit onto the surface and watch it bounce around. This would annoy my neighbor. It would also annoy Schiele. Schiele lived on

blueberry pop tarts and Austrian sausages. Schiele spent most of his time drawing female nudes. A book I looked at in the library said that Schiele's art was noted for its intensity and raw sexuality. That was good enough for me. My neighbor liked Schiele's nudes. So did I. Schiele gave my neighbor one of his drawings in return for rent. My neighbor said that Schiele could stay in the coop for as long as he liked. My neighbor's wife didn't like Schiele. She said he was not welcome in the house. She wasn't happy about him living in the coop but tolerated it because of her husband. She said Schiele's drawings were disgusting. They were the work of the devil. I would visit Schiele most days after school and on weekends. He was usually happy to see me. He would say "Welcome to my studio." He didn't refer to it as a coop or loft. He called it a studio. He would offer me some leftover blueberry pop tarts and Austrian sausage. We would chat for a bit but not for long because it was hard to hear one another over the cooing of the pigeons. Then he would get back to drawing naked women. I would keep one eye on the naked women and the other on the lookout for my mother who didn't like me visiting Schiele. Like my neighbor's wife my mother didn't like Schiele either. She

too thought his drawings were disgusting. She said that if I looked at Schiele's naked women drawings I would go blind. That didn't stop me. Schiele loved magic markers. He had tons of them in all colors. He would use them to draw the naked women. He would draw on a drafting table, on top of his small refrigerator, on a shelf, on the floor. He would sometimes climb onto the roof of the coop and draw there. He usually drew from memory but would occasionally bring a woman into the coop. When he did he would say that he had to concentrate, and politely ask me to leave. He once invited three women into the coop. It got really crowded. The pigeons got really excited. They got really loud. My neighbor came out of his house and knocked on the door of the coop. He said something to Schiele. The women left. That was the end of Schiele's life studies. After that he drew only from memory. A few weeks later a circus came to town. Schiele became smitten with the bearded strong woman. He drew her day and night. He was fascinated by her triceps and calves, her facial hair styled in a Van Dyke, and her baritone voice. He loved to watch her "pick things up and put them down." Schiele joined the circus and left town. After my neighbor died, his

widow got rid of the pigeons and paid me fifty bucks to knock down the coop.

### Your Makeshift Childhood

The matter-of-fact streets of your makeshift childhood crowd with regrets over the empty candy bins in May's News, the corner store stuffed with cigars, cigarettes, comics, skin mags, soda, ice cream. where daily you were dispatched for a double chocolate and the number. Done . . . and done again. And why not, yes? It's all there in the pianistic improvisations of Frederick Nietzsche who like all of us dreamed of the paper city of Carpe Diem shouldering his way through a table-read of Bela Tarr's *The Turin Horse*, a revitalization sequel to the twelve steps as leaked to NPR. I was asked to remind you that the marquee for the *The Last Picture Show* awaits your edits. And you're filming this for a surrogate?

### Appropriating Myself

*Do I contradict myself? Very well then, I contradict myself.*

- Buck Mulligan quoting Whitman in *Ulysses* by James Joyce

The dogs are in the trees again. And they're barking. I am escaped from the pages of Dickens, my words nestled all snug in their beds. A black and white segues from my past. A symbolist jumps in insisting on the last word. He is dressed down. Woe to those befuddled crossword puzzlers or those courting constellations on rooftops with the satisfaction of a meandering brook. This dealership is known for its BLTs. My place in the sun layered in dust is appropriated by a Jay Gatsby lookalike living on the edge with a certain *je ne sais quoi* despite the bulging lines at soup kitchens. Footsteps echo off buildings scheduled to be razed before change punctuates the thought-balloon - ghosts on the spur of the moment waiting for the lost to stumble, entering their shadows, cartographers linked in time. The baguette did come in handy as you said it would. But how did you know? Without blackbirds in the trees I wouldn't have the mind of summer. Why don't we rent a little bungalow on the water this summer where each midday we can crayon in our missing persons? The artichoke under glass dances to Mahler's slow movements rising from a wax cartridge in front of a great fire brimming with wooden arms and legs. The menus here are blank, the newspapers' words missing but with a trace of a message

that tricks us into thinking it can be pieced together and understood. Your free run wooden horse has run away. It was her heels - neon yellow spikes clickety-clacking though the intersection, charging gawkers a fee for a free ride - a free ride that would take them to the palisades of their dreams, leaving them winded with enough pocket change for the meter maid. Many are puzzled and await word from above. It will come. I want to be transported to an earlier time filled with jawbreakers stamped with phrases of affection. I suppose I too want it all. You called in for takeout. We selected items from two columns. That's when I decided it was time to refill the rapidograph with red ink and begin a series of one-liners in red - the red saturating the eye with disbelief. You audition for the part of Iago, thinking this would be a great way to spend the summer - a summer of unrequited doubles. It was a throwaway, I had to admit, that unsettling feeling you get as the bath water departs, counterclockwise, leaving you, toweled, thinking about the final scene in that film whose title is slipping away. The name Wichita could happen to any of us. Now what? Now what do we do?

## Man-Hole-Girl-Man-Hole

I brought my ghost to your man-hole. You were costumed, and being ogled by an ejaculator, who lost it when you measured him with your tongue. You took him home with Japanese on your motorcycle. He loved the miso, and licked your crayons into dawn. You asked him to jumpstart your new job. He opened wide, rang your bell, turned on the Super 8. The stream buffered. Your legs grew. The ogler and I stared as your therapist's transference lucked into your green mannequins.

## The Eroticism of Trees

You're transcribing the sounds of late summer: the secrets of trees, their openings, their closings. A breeze catches your skirt, and the eye of an event photographer qua accordionist. He morphs into a sapling, his notes fluttering to the ground.

## Midnight at Hannaford

Something is rotten in Deli, and there's a delay in Dairy, and the Sirens in Pastry are rehearsing like crazy. I'm trying to decide cart, basket, or gondola, while making small

talk with condiments. Something's out of balance. The theme's been changed to Detroit, and Kukla, Fran, and Ollie are opening in Produce. A memorandum of understanding is causing confusion in Meats, and the Blue Light Specials are turning green. And now look! The butcher in the bloody apron, the baker, and the candlestick maker are throwing tantrums in aisle 5, and Little Miss Something or Other is again complaining about the curds and whey. She's demanding double coupons, and calling for backup. The Manager has called in the Bomb Squad. Perry Como is crooning over Philip Glass's *Koyaanisqatsi*, and my grandmother is here from the grave, ready to Polka. I'm rethinking understudies, and the number of times. Ride it out, put in for a lateral, max out your sick leave.

#### I Take That Back

Subtleties aside, the grounding should have made a difference, the verisimilitude coloring the encounter, releasing the amplitude from those cheap enclosures. What's your experience been like? A crap shoot? How about the documentation? Does it continue to brittle, as the museologists said it would? Interestingly, the path, once

overgrown and impassable, welcomes us with benefits no less, some of which are far too outlandish to even consider. As it should be, I guess.

### Tubbing with Ziploc'd Kindle

Maybe it's nothing more than addition and subtraction, the artifacts from kiosks visited in times of dissonance, the incidentals clomping around in UGGs off-season clamoring for spectators and for those dealing from the bottom of the deck with stashes of empty cereal boxes tucked under both arms. You could have picked Door #2 but instead went with your hunch and ended up with a one-way ticket to Palookaville where nights over chessboards get hazy and strangers lean in with offers of whatever your little heart desires: summer days with nothing to do but catch rays on the back deck.

### Leaving Them Ho-Humming

OK, well, maybe not, but I still think it's a good idea. One that could fly. How could it not, given the enticement? It's not every day that you get a break like that. And just think, in no time, you'll have

that look which many find comforting as well as encompassing. I know I could have shopped around but, really, to what end? Even Cicero's third oration against Catiline drooped, leaving the crowd ho-humming. Don't play dumb. You know exactly what I mean. The taxing our endurance bit. Over the top? Yeah, so? And as for quantum computing? Listen, you take this cab, and I'll take that one, and we'll count down the difference, then apply the algorithm. Are you in or out? Or in and out? Not unlike Schrödinger's kitty, yes? You'll see. You keep telling me All Gaul is divided into three parts. OK, everything's connected. Entangled. I'll pinch that. You're not the only one with a Many Worlds bumper sticker, you know. Forget the downtime. Insignificant. Tell me, Does he ever leave the house? Does he ever come out? Have you ever seen him except on Skype? I'm not talking Lovecraft, here. Go ahead, ping it.

#### Hazarding Extinction

The spooky genius in you again hazards extinction. Has the inevitable contact with its inevitable uncoupling allowed you to pass through without knowing why, without clicking I agree, without committing to the restraining posture

of the unchartable, the words squeezed, the outcome windswept? Does the alternative, laced with spirals of forgotten, seem out of reach? Why bother? No idea? The rehearsal to get it right, alone, without collaboration, is enough, you think, to confess to, again and again and again?

### The Weather Outside

But then the tide turned and we were caught in the middle without the flicker. We sat there unconvinced, stuffing ourselves like olives until the light changed and the cabs resumed their squabbling. It was good to see green. Later at Joe's Tavern we continued our dissection of Part One which I felt was the least compelling of all three especially in Blu-ray. I was in the minority so I decided to try one of the highly recommended reds from Argentina. We had a good time despite the candles and cranky plumbing.

### Gastronomy 101

The charcuterie-loaded menu piqued your interest. You took the lift to the loft where it was all about to happen - a tough reservation, but well worth

the wait staff who had been trained in various mid-Atlantic states of service. A carousel stood in for the usual round-robin. You lost yourself in the cutlery but then repaired to the foyer where a well-seasoned foodie held forth with tales of tails from exotic eateries. Your esteemed colleague failed to show . . . again.

### Lately, the Bottlenecking

Your GPS is working overtime trying to avoid a turn for the worse as if a solitary moment will wrap its arms around you and guide you to the reference desk where tentacles of connections await your gentle probing. How often have you channel-surfed only to find that the best buys are unwilling to participate in your Glass Bead Game? Your hair was longer then, wasn't it? Everyone's was. I can't say that I remember *The Elements of Style* but I do remember that it was a long, strange trip, one we failed to duplicate though we tried several times with a collection of cosmopolitan cocktails. We even contacted the Watermelon Sugar Man who was nice enough to direct us to a pickle patch. With mixed results, I continue.

## The Street of Crocodiles

Chet Baker's *My Funny Valentine* fills this day of rain. You wander through *Elegy*, based on Philip Roth's *The Dying Animal*, turn away during certain scenes, your casualness shaken. There is nothing casual about death. Someone says something about the inability to string a narrative. The inability to do what? Whatever. Call in the Script Doctor, yes? There's havoc in your bullpen, and in your playpen, and in your world. Again, you have walked out during the crucial scene. Wait, you're telling me how screwed-up Chet was? At least he had what Ray Carver had. And you, too.

## A Night at the Opera

Aida opens with questions about the king salmon baked in rock salt with wild fennel gratin, and about the out-of-towners arriving by tram, a bit late, perhaps, but so what?, her angularity a stop sign, a natural for window shopping, open mics, shy interludes, late-night walks - a bit of fabric held between fingertips, watching movies together as one, hiding behind a spectrum of proclivities, wide-eyed and open-mouthed. The pit crew sporting Desert

Storm footwear and J. Crew blazers -  
What's with that? - demands special accommodations for members of their extended tribe entering stage left with picnic baskets and perfect bound programs wet with autographs and Venetian doodles, tuning out the world, again, and again, and again, bathed in the cool breeze of this late summer evening. The lights flicker. Valets exchange glances. The monitor lapses into a display of stock quotes, the audience, lost without translation, carried aloft by mellifluous arias in the original.

The Fluperfect Storm

*You have your heaven, it said, go to it.*

- William Carlos Williams, *The Hurricane*

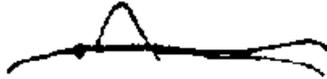
The White Rabbit is late, and Snow White is yellow. There's enough time on the meter for one checkmate and enough water under the bridge for one week. The Ghosts of Christmases Past are here, conferencing with the Three Bears. Goldilocks has had her roots painted for a photo op as Shepherdress of the Moment. The Energizer Bunny has snuffed out the Green Lantern and squirreled away fresh batteries and

doughnuts. The books to be read are nestled all snug in their Kindle.

### On the Street (Where You Live?)

Next time I'll rehearse more, dissect my lines, diagram them, as I did decades ago for my Latin teacher, a young woman in full habit, who held me in thrall: You've got to change your evil ways, bay-beh. I never got there, and never would, which demonstrates something, I guess. Oh, by the way, I was riveted by the immersion and wherewithal of your coveralls as you mobilized yourself to meet the winter, which will doubtless arrive amid a volley of head butts, attempting to escort you into oblivion, not unlike the killer whales on last night's *Animal Planet*, who took out a grey whale and her calf in full view of boatloads of whale watchers stunned by the realization - as professed by, among others, the late Stephen Jay Gould whose student evaluations at Harvard reputedly proclaimed: *He knows everything about everything!* - that the world of the wild is not a peaceable, ethical kingdom.





swimming in happenstance press

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*Portrait of Wally* by Egon Schiele

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